

Italy, Nepal, Nigeria, Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Spain, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Switzerland, Turkey, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkmenistan, U.K., U.S.A., Uganda, Vietnam and Yemen.

Intelligence agencies and field formations of Customs are alert to detect and prevent smuggling of goods and violations of Customs Act. Strict vigil is being maintained at all International Airports/ports and sensitive areas of the borders to prevent smuggling and apprehend the offenders including foreigners. Specific measures taken include surveillance and use of sophisticated equipments like metal detectors, colour baggage X-Ray machines at Airports/ports and Land Customs Stations. A number of vehicles have been provided for anti smuggling operations throughout the country. Further, two helicopters have been positioned since July, 1996 in the West Coast for Anti-smuggling work cum surveillances. Training is being imparted to the officers to improve their skills and abilities.

All cases of smuggling and violations of Customs Act/ Rules which are detected are followed up by proper and timely investigation adjudication, and prosecution against all accused including foreign nationals.

[Translation]

Decline in National Savings

*454. SHRI JAGATVIR SINGH DRONA : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether various savings schemes launched by the Government have received a serious set back due to high interest rates offered by Private Companies and financial institutions;

(b) whether a decline of 11 percent in National Savings Schemes has been registered alone during the current year in comparison to last year;

(c) whether Government rates in all deposit schemes are half to one and a half percent lower than the rates offered by the Private Companies and institutions; and

(d) if so, the steps taken or proposed to be taken by the Government to remedy the situation?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBRAM) : (a) and (b) No Sir. The gross collections in the various small savings Schemes launched by the Government of India show an increasing trend over the years. The actual figures for 1996-97 are not yet available.

(c) The Small Savings Schemes launched by Government of India are not comparable with the Schemes offered by Private Companies/Institutions. Each saving instrument is designed to cater to different requirements of small savers.

(d) Does not arise.

[English]

Organisation of Islamic Countries

*455. KUMARI SUSHILA TIRIYA : Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that organisation of Islamic countries at its meeting held on March 24, 1997 have agreed to support Pakistan on its Kashmir Policies and in liberating Kashmir from India;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the name of countries who attended the meetings and signed the declaration?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP) : (a) and (b) The OIC at a Special Summit in Islamabad on March 23, 1997 adopted a Special Declaration on Jammu & Kashmir. This document makes observations about J & K and calls for action which echoes Pakistan's well-known views on the issue.

(c) The meeting was attended by OIC countries, whose names are given in the attached Statement.

Statement

1. Jordan
2. Azerbaijan
3. Afghanistan (seat vacant)
4. Albania
5. United Arab Emirates
6. Indonesia
7. Uganda
8. Iran
9. Pakistan
10. Bahrain
11. Brunei Darussalam
12. Burkina Faso
13. Bangladesh
14. Benin
15. Turkey
16. Chad
17. Tunisia
18. Gabon
19. Gambia
20. Algeria
21. Comoros
22. Djibouti
23. Saudi Arabia

24. Senegal
25. Sudan
26. Syria
27. Sierra Leone
28. Somalia
29. Iraq
30. Oman
31. Guinea
32. Guinea-Bissau
33. Palestine
34. Kirghystan
35. Qatar
36. Cameroon
37. Kuwait
38. Lebanon
39. Libya
40. Maldives
41. Mali
42. Malaysia
43. Egypt
44. Morocco
45. Mauritania
46. Niger
47. Nigeria
48. Yemen
49. Mozambique
50. Turkmenistan
51. Tajikistan
52. Kazakhstan
53. Surinam
54. Guyana

[Translation]

Increase in the cost of Passport

*456. SHRI MAHESH KUMAR M. KANODIA :
SHRI ILIYAS AZMI :

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state :

(a) the details of the cost of passport and increase in the cost made during the last one year;

(b) the reasons for continuous increase in the cost of passport;

(c) whether the Government propose to simplify and streamline the procedure for issuing passports and to reduce its cost; and

(d) if so, the steps proposed to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP) : (a) to (d) There has been no increase in the fees for various passport services including issue of fresh passports since July, 1993.

A number of steps have been taken to simplify and streamline the procedures for expeditious issue of passports which, *inter-alia*, are:

- (a) upgradation of office facilities including computerisation leading to faster screening and processing of applications;
- (b) simplification of passport and miscellaneous services forms;
- (c) issue of passports without any further wait for police clearance in cases where police reports are not received during the prescribed time-limit of four weeks;
- (d) a thorough scrutiny of applications at the acceptance stage itself to check their completeness/correctness in all respects;
- (e) augmentation of staff strength to reduce and clear pendencies;
- (f) provision to issue passports in cases of emergency/urgency on out of turn basis on the strength of Verification Certificate issued by an authorised official ;
- (g) expansion of the list of officials authorised to sign Verification Certificates;
- (h) introduction of passports valid for 20 years; and
- (i) automatic reissue of passports on expiry without fresh police verification.

There is no proposal to reduce the fees for passports in view of the constant increase in the cost of production of the passport booklets.

Use of Indian Languages

*457. SHRI RAM TAHAL CHAUDHARY : Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Union Government have given option to answer questions in all the competitive examinations for recruitment to different services in Indian languages;

(b) if so, the names of all these services;

(c) whether the resolution to this effect passed by the Parliament on 18 January, 1968 has been fully implemented; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor and the time by which the Government intend to implement it?